

HOW TO... Master layers

If you want to edit images like a pro, you need to use layers. Colin Mackleworth takes an advanced photo-editing technique and makes it seem like child's play

ADOBE PHOTOSHOP ELEMENTS 6



Mastering layers will take your image-editing skills to new heights. Layers are an essential part of any professional designer's armoury, letting you work on different parts of an image without altering the original file. Layers are like stacks of transparent paper lying on top of one another. Individual layers can be modified in many ways, from making subtle colour changes to adding exotic filter effects.

For this tutorial, we have used Adobe Photoshop Elements 6, a 30-day trial version of which is on the cover DVD. If you want to follow this walkthrough exactly, use the JPEG image called Childs Play.jpg on the cover disc.

1 Open the image in Photoshop Elements. If the Layers palette is not visible to the right of the image, click the Full button at the top of the screen to display it. Select the text tool from the toolbox on the left-hand side (its icon is a capital T). Choose the font, the size of the text and the colour from the options bar at the top. Click on the image and type the text you want on your picture. We've used a font called PaintyPaint, a free download from www.dafont.com. Click the green Commit tick on the option bar when you're happy with the text.

The text you typed has created a new layer in the Layers palette. You can now experiment with the size, weight and colour of your type without affecting your original image.

2 To make the words stand out, we're going to create a coloured background to go behind the text. To do this, create a new layer. On the Layers palette, click New Layer. Double-

click on this layer to name it; we've called our new layer 'Blob'. To choose the colour of the blob, set the foreground colour from the toolbox on the left or select Window, Colour Swatches from the menu bar at the top of the screen.

Click on the brush tool in the toolbox. This gives a range of preset brush styles in the option bar at the top; we used the chalk brush. Then paint over your text. Don't worry if you make a mistake, as the blob will remain editable. Hover over the layer in the Layers tab, left-click and drag this layer below the text layer. The text will now appear on top of the blob.

3 The blob looks a little flat, so give it a 3D effect by creating a bevel. In the Effects palette on the right-hand side, click on Layer Styles. The icon you need is a green rectangle on top of a blue rectangle. Choose Bevels from the drop-down menu and double-click on Simple Inner. The Blob layer in the Layers palette now has an 'fx' icon next to it. This means you can edit the effect you have applied to this layer. Double-click on 'fx', and the Style Settings palette appears. Experiment with the size and the lighting angle until you're happy with the effect, then click OK.

4 We're going to create a border around the picture. We need to create a layer below the Background. At the moment the Background is locked, as you can see from the padlock icon next to it in the previous step. To unlock it, double-click on the padlock and rename the new layer. We've called ours Image. Next, create another new Layer and call it Border.

We now need to increase the size of the canvas by going to the Menu bar and selecting Image, Resize, Canvas size. Increase the width and height of the canvas by half an inch. Choose a colour from the toolbox on the left or select Window, Colour Swatches from the menu bar. We chose the same colour we used for the text. Click on the Paint Bucket tool in the toolbox. Hover your mouse over the image, then left-click. The Border layer will change colour. Drag the Border layer to the bottom of the Layer palette, and the border will appear around the picture.

5 The border looks boring, so we're going to create a stroke around the Border layer. Choose Edit, Stroke (Outline) Selection from the Menu bar and, in the dialog box that appears, type in 15px (pixels) and select the colour you want to use. We have chosen the same blue we used for the blob. Check the Inside button in the Location box and click OK.

6 The border still looks flat. To give it depth, click on the Image layer and choose Layer Styles from the Effects palette. Select Inner Shadows from the drop-down menu and double-click Low. Experiment with the inner shadow by double-clicking the 'fx' icon. We made the lighting angle 130° and, in the Stroke box, we chose the same colour we used for the blob and made the stroke 4px (pixels) wide.

Save the layered version of your image so you can edit it. Finally, flatten the image by clicking on the arrows on the right of the Layers palette and selecting Flatten. Your image can now be printed or used in another application. **CS**

